

# Teenage boys watching hours of internet pornography every week are treating their girlfriends like sex objects

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The English verb to chaperone comes from the French noun 'chaperon' - protector - and it is first recorded in Jane Austen's novel *Sense And Sensibility*, published in 1811.

Then, the reputation of a young woman was considered so precious that she was protected at all times if in male company by the presence of another woman: a chaperone.

In Jane Austen's world, a young woman and a young man were rarely, if ever, left alone together.

Two hundred years later, with sexual and feminist revolutions behind us, we're in a world where there are few, if any, boundaries in place to 'protect' a woman's honour.

Teenage boys are watching hours of internet pornography every week

Women are free to behave as they wish, sleep with whomever they wish, and the vast amounts of sexual content on TV and in films attests to that.

In fact, many women would argue that the very idea of being 'chaperoned' is restrictive and demeaning.

And yet among today's teenage girls, the chaperone has made a surprising and - as we shall come to see - disturbing comeback.

Today's chaperone is called, in teenspeak, a 'third wheel'. And she is not being forced on girls by concerned or controlling adults worried about honour and etiquette.

## Type the words 'sex pictures' into Google and it returns 83 million results in less than one-tenth of a second

The third wheel (the verb is 'to third wheel') has been re-invented by the girls themselves because they want protection from the sexual demands of their boyfriends.

When I spoke to many teenage girls in researching the subject, they told me these demands are both 'disturbing and upsetting', and they are certain they're being fuelled by what their boyfriends are watching online: hard-core, explicit porn.

This deeply worrying trend is finally starting to be noticed by those in authority.

Psychologist Dr Linda Papadopoulos has just published a government report into the sexualisation of children, and is certain that exposure to porn is having an adverse affect on the lives of today's teenagers.

'My research has left me extremely concerned,' she says. 'A recent survey showed that 54 per cent of boys found porn "really inspiring" in terms of sexual performance. This worries me, because of the nature of the material they are now watching.

'This isn't the type of pornography that was around when we were teenagers. What kids are seeing today is very often violent, and it has no intimacy, no respect, no kindness, no context of sex within a loving relationship.

'It is very damaging to young people and to their relationships.'

This 'obsession' with porn has now permeated the internet. According to statistics published in last week's report on the sexualisation of children, a quarter of all search- engine requests are porn-related, and 1.5 per cent of all the websites in existence are pornographic.



Only 37 per cent of parents have set up any parental controls on their teenagers' computers (Posed by model)

Type the words 'sex pictures' into the popular search engine Google and it returns 83 <cite>million </cite>results in less than one-tenth of a second.

Material that would have sparked an obscenity trial in my mother's day is now just a click away. It's deeply shocking.

While most computers do now come with filters that can be activated to block inappropriate material, the latest research by internet software companies suggests only 37 per cent of families in the UK have set up any sort of parental controls on their teenagers' computers.

But modern teenagers are technology savvy: either they can get round the controls themselves, or they can simply go to the house of a friend whose access is not blocked.

John Carr, head of the Children's Coalition on Child Internet Safety, warns that the advice to keep children safe by not allowing them to access a computer alone in their bedroom is already out of date.

## 'Boys just want us to do all the stuff they see porn stars do' one 16-year-old girl told me

'This stuff is everywhere now because of the way technology is changing,' he says. 'Kids can get it on their mobile phones, through their TV sets and iPods. Tragically, porn has never been easier to access.'

And that 'easy access', according to a group of 15 to 17-year-old girls I met while researching this article, is changing the way their boyfriends are approaching sex.

These young women are articulate, confident, streetwise. They come from a selection of London's top independent and state schools, are dressed in slinky black skirts, dark tights, trendy T-shirts and Ugg boots.

They are charming and respectable, but what they tell me is shocking.

'Boys just want us to do all the stuff they see the porn stars do,' one 16-year-old girl told me. 'It's as if we have to pretend we are in a movie.'

'They want us to dress like porn stars in sexy underwear, have bodies that look like porn stars, and sound and behave like them too when we are alone. That's why we like to have our friends around us now.'

Another 15-year-old told me that what her 16-year-old boyfriend had wanted her to do had made her cry.

The sexual request is not suitable to be described in a family paper, but as the mother of three daughters aged 16, 15 and 13, I found it particularly upsetting.

The girl told me the act was now considered to be the final frontier by dare-devil teenage boys; the so-called 'fifth base'.

Reassuringly, she did tell me she knew of no girl who had actually done it, and she herself had refused and stopped seeing the boy. But when I was 15, I had never even heard of it.

'It makes me feel so unhappy to be even asked about this stuff by a boy,' one girl told me. 'So I try not to be alone with a boyfriend any more, to have a third wheel whenever I can.'

## Depressingly, it does appear that for teenage boys online porn is becoming a fact of life

Another 16-year-old said, rather surprisingly, that while many young girls might moan about their parents being too strict, she actually resented her parents' 'forward-thinking' liberal attitude.

'I wish my parents would say I'm not allowed to be home alone with a boy. I wish they'd say boys aren't allowed in my bedroom. They make this big deal about "trusting us", but that's not helping me. They have no idea what goes on, and I'm too embarrassed to tell them.'

I meet another young girl who is 16 and wants to be a lawyer. She has been going out with a boy for four months and really likes him; but she says he changes when they are alone together.

'He even starts talking as if he's in a movie,' she says. 'Suddenly, when we are being intimate, he'll say something that he must have heard in a porn film. For example, he'll call me a "bitch" and use dirty language that he'd never use normally.'

It's awful. It's so obvious he's copying his actions from watching porn. No boy would call you beautiful. They use words like "hot" and "sexy". That's why my friends and I like using third wheels. We want protection.

'We don't, of course, want a world where we are not equal, like it was in Jane Austen's day. But in some ways we've gone back to inequality anyway because we are not being treated equally when it comes to what boys want from us when we are alone with them.'

'It's all about performing sexual acts for them, and they assume we'll love it.'

Teenagers have always exaggerated how far they are going - or being asked to go - and how much sex they are having. So what they say about sex, especially when in a group, has to be taken with caution.

But depressingly, it does appear that for teenage boys online porn is becoming a fact of life.

## Only 37 per cent of families in the UK have set up any sort of parental controls on their teenagers' computers

Latest figures suggest that boys spend as much as three hours a week gazing at porn; absorbing unrealistic images of aesthetically enhanced people, many of whom are engaged in multi-partner, violent and perverted sex acts.

Some teenage boys go further and join live sex chats with strangers.

Before the internet, it was believed that the average age at which a boy was first exposed to soft and still pornography - the sort that appears in a top-shelf magazine like Playboy - was 11.

The online material available now is much more explicit video, and the latest research by the London School of Economics suggests that boys even younger than 11 may accidentally or deliberately be watching it.

One of the girls in the group I spoke to told me she found a nine-year-old boy she was babysitting watching explicit porn on the family computer when she went to read him his bedtime story.

'I think he did it to embarrass me,' she said. 'Which it most definitely did. I didn't tell his mother.'

Another university student told me about a boy of 14 she knew who had become so hooked on porn that his horrified parents had removed his bedroom door so they could see what he was up to.

And the boys I spoke to while writing this piece freely admitted that they frequently watch online porn - and enjoy it.

The first group I met were sixth-form boys at a boarding school. Some admitted they did find it a useful way to learn about sex; others told me they sought out the most hardcore material to send to each other 'for a laugh'.

When I asked if they felt they were being desensitised by watching so much explicit material, they clearly thought I was a prude.

In London, I met another group of boys who told me that they, too, routinely watched porn and that it was a good way of learning about sex and girls.

'It tells us how to act and what they want,' one told me. 'So that has to be a good thing. It doesn't mean we are sex maniacs. We are just not as uptight about sex as your generation.'

That, disturbingly, is not what I found from talking to the girls.

Dr Michael Flood, a sociologist based at the Australian Research Centre for Sex Health and Society, is at the forefront of international research into how exposure to internet porn is influencing the behaviour of teenagers.

He has just completed a study examining the impact of porn on the young people who watch it.

'Boys who watch explicit sexual material develop an increasing belief that all of their friends and peers must all be highly sexually active,' he told me. This, he believes, is desensitising them and putting them under pressure to be doing the same.

'When boys are repeatedly exposed to what I call nonmainstream-sexual behaviours, they may be more likely to accept and adopt them as well.

'I am also very concerned that exposure to aggressive or violent pornography may be blurring the lines of consent.'

In other words, he believes boys who watch violent porn are more likely to behave violently.

None of the girls I spoke to complained about sexual violence, but they did talk about the difficulty of daring to say 'No' in a world that expects them to say 'Yes'. And some did have experience of what they called sexual bullying.

One girl told me a boy had used topless photos of her to try to blackmail her into 'going further'. Another said her boyfriend was quite 'aggressive in manner' when they were alone together, which she didn't like or understand, using language that, she believes, he learnt watching sadomasochistic porn.

They were also all very frightened of the boys revealing intimate details about what they called their 'performance' and body for public ridicule, which with social networking sites such as Bebo and Facebook can be done in seconds to a mass audience.

There was another aspect of the boys' behaviour that they resented and feared: their interest in seeing the girls behave sexually with each other - something they say they are sure is coming from exposure to porn.

Sometimes, if we play truth or dare, or spin the bottle at a party, they will ask us to kiss each other,' one girl told me. 'And they'll joke about worse stuff just to embarrass us. It is bullying.'

A recent survey carried out by the NSPCC revealed that one in three teenage girls aged 13 to 17 had been subjected to unwanted sexual acts while in a relationship, and one in four had suffered 'partner violence'.

The NSPCC's head of child protection, Christopher Cloke, has described this as evidence of a 'culture of confusion about what is acceptable among girls and boys living in today's highly sexualised landscape'.

John Carr agrees. He has for years been campaigning to put in place better measures to protect children from this deluge of pornography, and now, as the generation which has grown up exposed to such a deluge of porn reaches sexual maturity, he fears the consequences.

'It should be very much harder for kids to get at,' he says. 'Having filters already activated at point of sale on all computers is an obvious solution for worried parents. It would be a start.'

A good start for the next generation of girls, perhaps, but too late for this one.

We now have girls who have grown up in such a highly sexualised environment that some have been left feeling frightened and unhappy. This, just at the time when they should be falling in love for the first time and learning to trust the opposite sex.

We have given our daughters the education and aspiration to be a prime minister or an astronaut. But we haven't protected them from the sexualisation that makes them so scared to be alone with a boy that they've quietly brought back the chaperone.

When Jane Austen wrote *Sense And Sensibility* 200 years ago, Marianne Dashwood says to her sister Elinor: perhaps men 'do not see us as people but as playthings'. If Austen were writing today, Marianne might have complained: men 'do not see us as people, but as porn stars'.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1255856/Teenage-boys-watching-hours-internet-pornography-week-treating-girlfriends-like-sex-objects.html#ixzz0lSz9JVBQ>